



READ MY LIPS

QREADS

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Lupe Herrera stood in front of Schmidt's desk, trying to control her temper. "I'm not the enemy," she said.

Lieutenant Schmidt crossed his thick arms over his chest. "I never said I had a problem with you, Lupe."

"True," she said. "You've never said much of anything. But I haven't been given the cooperation I need from you and the rest of the squad."

"Okay, okay," Schmidt said, turning toward his computer. "I'll see that you get all the cooperation you need."

"One more thing, sir," she added.

Schmidt sighed and looked back at her reluctantly.

“I’d really appreciate it,” she went on, “if you’d turn around and look at me when you’re speaking to me.”

“Oh, yeah. Right,” he said. “Sorry. I keep forgetting about—”

“—my being deaf,” Lupe finished for him. “That’s one reason,” she said stiffly. “But mainly, I’d appreciate being treated with a little more respect.”

“*Fine!*” Schmidt said impatiently.

“Thank you very much,” Lupe said as she walked out of Schmidt’s office, silently fuming. Detective Harris glanced up from his desk and scowled at her.

“You’re looking very well today, Detective,” Lupe said brightly. He grunted in reply.

Detective Diego Molina also looked up at her. Then he nodded and smiled sympathetically. He was the only male in the squad who’d treated Lupe as a fellow professional.

Lupe returned to her desk, which was just outside Schmidt’s office.

She began to read a file, when a young man wearing a big smile walked in the

squadroom door.

“Hey, guys!” he called out. He held a box of cigars.

“Hey!” Detective Harris greeted him in return. “It’s the new dad!”

Everyone crowded around the young man, slapping him on the back. He looked exhausted and happy.

Lieutenant Schmidt called out, “How’s the baby, Detective? Your little guy ready for officer’s training yet?”

All the men laughed. Glancing over at Lupe, the young detective said, “Who’s sitting at my desk?”

Lupe could only guess that he had lowered his voice. What he didn’t know was that she could read his lips—and everyone else’s.

Schmidt’s look was derisive. “Oh, she’s been sent here from the mayor’s office,” he said. “She’s part of that stupid ‘job efficiency’ task force.”

“Huh? What’s that?” the young detective asked nervously.

“They think they can pop in here, snoop

through our timesheets, and tell us how to work more efficiently,” Schmidt said with a sneer. “But I’m sure she’ll just shuffle some paper, write up a report on us for some idiot at the mayor’s office, and be gone in a week.” He laughed and then snarled, “Like we don’t know how to do the job right in the first place!”

The men all nodded in agreement.

The young detective held out the box of cigars. “Light up, guys,” he said.

Schmidt turned and looked directly at Lupe. “I’m *shocked*, Detective! You know that smoking’s not allowed in government buildings. We light up in here and she might just tell on us!” He looked back at the men. “At least that would be one thing the super snoop could report to the mayor!” He laughed loudly.

Then Schmidt took the box and held it out to Lupe. “Care for a cigar?” he offered. His tone was taunting. Behind him, the men had suddenly gone silent. Several were smirking.

Lupe looked at him coolly. “No, thank you,”

she said. "I don't smoke. But please don't let me stop *you*."

Then Schmidt deliberately lit his cigar, inhaled deeply, and blew out a plume of smoke in Lupe's direction. One by one, the other men followed suit. The air in the Southern Police Station quickly became a gray haze.

Lupe had tried cigarettes when she was younger, and hated them. Now, the thick cigar smoke in the room was actually making her feel sick.

Schmidt went back into his office, plopped down in his chair, and opened a large lunch bag. He was a big man with a big appetite. Unwrapping a huge sandwich, he wrapped his thick fingers around it and took a bite.

The heavy smells of cheese, pickles, and salami drifted through Schmidt's door. Lupe felt nauseated. *Don't look*, she told herself. She didn't want to see any food right now.

She looked. Schmidt was chewing a huge mouthful. A ragged piece of lettuce hung from his lips. Watery mustard dripped down his wrist.

Lupe got up, feeling a little faint. She started walking toward the restroom. Then she ran. The men's laughter followed her.



The next morning, Lupe woke up with a start. Her alarm clock hadn't gone off. The alarm, which woke her up by vibrating, wasn't under her pillow. She looked around and finally found it on the floor. When she looked at the time, she groaned. She'd be late!

Lupe hurried into the squadroom hoping Schmidt wouldn't notice her—and make some cutting remark. But Schmidt was across the room, talking to several officers. She saw him say, “Toya's back in San Francisco.” She moved to a spot where she could watch him better.

“He's got a girlfriend who lives at 901 Folsom, fifth floor,” Schmidt went on. “What I'd like to do is put a bug in there. But getting in will be tricky. Toya's probably got lookouts on duty around the clock.”

“I know that block,” Lupe blurted out. “Maybe I could read his lips from the building across the street. Sooner or later he’d probably say something you’d be able to use on him.”

Schmidt gave her a blank look. The other men stared, surprised. Diego said, “That could work! We wouldn’t need a bug if she could read his lips.”

Lieutenant Schmidt was silent. Then he nodded slowly. “It’s worth a try, I guess,” he said. “If I can get permission from the mayor’s office, you can take Lupe over there, Diego, and see if this idea will work.”

Lupe’s heart hammered in her chest. What had she gotten herself into?



Two hours later, Lupe and Diego were headed toward Folsom Street. She watched him as he drove. His, hands, broad and strong looking, rested lightly on the wheel.

“Who’s this guy, Toya?” she asked.

“He’s a thief,” Diego said. “A really bold one. He’ll rob a place in broad daylight. Specializes in big-ticket items. He knows what’s valuable and who’ll buy it.”

“A real bad guy, huh? Has he ever done time?” asked Lupe.

“Not a single day,” Diego said. “Last year we caught two of his people. They wouldn’t say a thing about him. They’re really loyal—or scared.” He gave her a warm smile and said, “Hey, I’m real sorry about that cigar deal yesterday. You looked kind of green. Are you okay now?”

“Yeah, I’m okay,” Lupe said. “But I must admit that Schmidt drives me crazy sometimes.”

Diego laughed. “He really resents anyone from the mayor’s office telling him what to do.”

“More like he doesn’t want *anyone* telling him what to do,” said Lupe.

Diego laughed again. “You’ve got that right,” he said. “Plus, you’re a woman—and he’s an old-school guy.”

Maybe it was the warmth of his eyes that made Lupe give in to a sudden impulse. “Are you seeing anyone?” she blurted out.

“Uh—” he stuttered. The back of his neck had turned red.

“No! Never mind!” she broke in. “I didn’t mean to say that. Sometimes I’m so stupid,” she finished in a murmur. She wished she could just jump out of the car and run.

Nothing else was said until they reached 901 Folsom Street. It was a five-story apartment building. Its blue paint had faded almost to white. Lupe glanced up and saw that most people on the upper floors left their curtains open. She hoped Toya’s girlfriend was one of them.

The building on the other side of the street was six stories tall. Good! A room in front would make a great lookout spot.

“Looks like a go,” said Diego. “Let’s head back.” Now his manner seemed distant, formal. Lupe’s foolish outburst hung between them like a brick wall.